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| DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR |                    |
| REVIEWED BY <i>2 TCHKEA</i>  | DATE <i>4/7/51</i> |
| REASON(S) FOR XDC/EXT. DATE  |                    |
| TS AUTH.                     |                    |
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NOTES, PPS MEETING 9:00-10:15 a.m., June 24, 1948

Present: George Kennan  
George Butler  
Bernard Gufler  
Ware Adams  
Max Bishop

Robert Newbegin, CPA  
William Walker, CRB  
Willard Barber, CRB

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Subject: Disturbances in Caribbean area.

The signatories to the Havana Convention are obligated not to permit their territories to be used for the organization of activities directed against neighboring states. One big flaw is that Guatemala, while being a signatory, has never ratified the Convention so it is not in effect bound by it, and at the present time most of the revolutionary activities in the area seem to be centered in Guatemala. The principal cause of the disturbance is the activities of exiles from one country who reside in another country and stir up difficulties there. It has taken the form largely of ideological conflict, with the so-called democratic groups seeking to overthrow the dictatorships,

Guatemala's present ambition is to establish a Central American Union, but it is meeting much opposition to the plan.

The full-scale revolutionary plot against the Dominican Republic organized in Cuba during 1947 had the assistance and encouragement of high officials of the Cuban Government. It involved Dominican exiles and irresponsible Cuban citizens who were looking for adventure and money. The group included some U.S. aviators who had served with our Air Forces in the war. Aircraft had been procured illegally from the U.S., and arms from Guatemala and Argentina.

Palace clique in Havana had failed to take the chief of the Cuban Army into their confidence (the Navy chief was in the group), and about two weeks before the scheduled invasion of the Dominican Republic, a rift in the Cuban police force caused the Army chief to move in to maintain order. Once in, he broke up the revolutionary movement. Leaders were arrested and imprisoned. The leaders were later freed; and although their arms and aircraft were confiscated, some were probably sent to Guatemala. Some of the revolutionary leaders have arrived in Guatemala now.

The new president of Cuba, Prío Socarras, will probably give the Dominican revolutionaries his sympathy. The Cuban Minister of Education took a prominent part in Prío's campaign and either Prío or his wife is related to a Dominican exile. It would be no surprise if the revolutionary group revived after Prío's inauguration in October.

Ambassador

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Ambassador Norweb spoke to the Foreign Minister and urged action to prevent interference in the Dominican Republic. The assurance was given that Cuban territory would not be used to overthrow a friendly government, that Cuba had always adhered to the non-intervention pact and would continue to do so. (The Cuban record on international agreements is bad).

Relations between Venezuela and the Dominican Republic have been strained for years. The Dominicans, a year and a half ago, were definitely involved in plans to overthrow the Venezuelan Government. Even last January Dominicans were involved with the Nicaraguans in a plot to bomb Caracas. Dominicans allege that Dominican exiles in Venezuela are plotting the overthrow of the Dominican Government and that they are being encouraged by the Venezuelan Government. Similarly, the Venezuelan Government continues to make statements that the Dominicans are assisting Venezuelan exiles in plots to overthrow the Venezuelan Government.

A report received a few days ago indicated that a plot had been uncovered for revolt against the present government of Venezuela and that Venezuelan exiles in the Dominican Republic were going to obtain aircraft there which they would use in bombing Venezuela. The Dominicans do have five fighter aircraft, acquired illegally from the U.S., and those aircraft were being serviced and fitted with belly tanks. They were reported to be made available to Nicaragua, but there is some question that instead they were to be used in a plot against Venezuela.

We know the names of two or three American aviators who presumably flew aircraft to the Dominican Republic. Laxity on the part of customs authorities in enforcing regulations permits American aviators to take planes out of the U.S. without export permits, on the proviso that they will be returned to the U.S. within six months. Two weeks ago an American aviator took a P-38 out of Miami which he said would be used by him and would be returned (this aircraft happens to be one of those being prepared for use in either Venezuela or Guatemala).

Another development is that several Americans who participated in the anti-Dominican activities in Cuba last year, and who violated export control laws and took arms out of this country, were indicted and prosecuted in federal courts in Miami and Jacksonville, but without exception were acquitted by jury trial. The customs authorities are concerned because the acquittal is apt to lend encouragement to other aviators who are anxious to make money.

The revolutionary attempt in Cuba was financed partly by Dominican exiles (who had succeeded in getting their money out of the Dominican Republic before it was confiscated); and by the Venezuelan Government to a certain extent. The Cuban Minister of Education also advanced funds, and it is claimed that one of the Dominican exiles

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has been reimbursed by the Minister of Education for the financial assistance he advanced to the revolutionary forces. The Cuban political situation is such that Aleman (the Cuban Minister of Education) largely financed the political campaign of Prio Osocaras, so Prio will undoubtedly feel obligated to him.

A year ago the center of the difficulty in Latin America was the situation between Guatemala and Nicaragua. At that time there was much activity on the part of the Nicaraguan exiles who were encouraged by the fact that the U.S. had not recognized the regime put in power by Somoza. The activities centered in Guatemala and attempts were made to get American arms and munitions. The U.S. authorities advised the Guatemalans that aircraft flown there illegally from the U.S. should not be used in any moves against Nicaragua. The Guatemalan Government denied any such use.

This bickering came to a crisis in the Costa Rican civil war. Ulate, the candidate who was certified by the electoral board as having been elected, was opposition candidate running against Guardia who had the backing of Mora and the communists. There was agreement between Ulate and Guardia that they would abide by the decision of the electoral board. Guardia, backed by Mora, declined to abide by the decision and Congress annulled the decision.

Both Nicaragua and Guatemala became interested in the problem and both intervened. Most of the arms which Figueres' group (backing Ulate) had at their disposal came from Guatemala (some 28 plane loads flown in from Guatemala).

The government of Guatemala is not communist but is playing along in many ways.

Somoza and the Nicaraguans support Mora and Guardia (Somoza and Guardia have been associated personally in the cattle business).

Nicaragua and Guatemala were requested to observe international commitments. The Guardia Government made a request for assistance and a Nicaraguan force was sent into Costa Rica and actually took three towns. Somoza told our Charge, who was instructed to inform Somoza of our disapproval and to request the withdrawal of the force immediately from Costa Rica. Somoza withdrew the troops. The rebel group under Figueres came out on top because of support from Guatemala.

Somoza always informed the U.S. what he was going to do and we could therefore use influence with him; Guatemala never told us, so we couldn't do anything there. Somoza was anxious to have our recognition and that certainly had some effect.

The Honduran elections .. will be held in October. The opposition candidate has not much prospect unless there is help from outside, or a revolution. There are some indications that he could get help from Guatemala. Hondurans have brought it to our attention on various occasions.

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Of the three dictators (Trujillo, Somoza and Carías), Somoza has been by far the best in not interfering in his neighbors' affairs. Salvador hasn't been much involved either.

There is agreement between Figueres and Guatemala that the former will give at least moral support to Guatemalan plans. He will permit Guatemalans to enlist in any force that may be organized in Costa Rica.

Cuba and Guatemala are trying to take the lead in tossing out dictators. Venezuela, too, with the support of Costa Rica.

The action we have taken, with the one exception of the Nicaraguan invasion of Costa Rica, has been pretty ineffectual. On January 17, 1948, our Embassies were instructed by circular telegrams to approach their governments not to permit their territory to be used by groups organizing revolutions. On January 23 we were in touch with Guatemala about American planes and continual reports of pending revolution against Nicaragua with Guatemalan participation. On March 19, our Ambassador in Guatemala was instructed to verify Guatemalan aid to Costa Rica and to endeavor to get a statement out of President Arevalo. (Arevalo admitted sympathy, but no assistance.) On March 27 a circular was sent out giving information as to what Nicaragua had done and appealing for support of other American republics in trying to dissuade Somoza from further activities. On May 12, the American Embassies were again instructed to request American governments to make statements as to their intentions.

U.S. representations in such matters, unless pressed vigorously, will discredit our diplomatic pressure. Consideration should be given to problem of Inter-American procedures, but not one of the countries is willing to throw the question open for discussion because it is sure to backfire. Nothing can be done under the Rio Treaty until it is ratified. The Havana Convention has been breached but doesn't provide machinery to do anything. The Gondra Treaties of 1923 provide for setting up a Commission of Inquiry. It is a laborious process but might be worth trying. Under the Gondra treaties, the commission to be set up would consist of the three diplomatic representatives longest in service in Washington and in this case Honduras and Cuba would be included.

We made our position worse by the stand we took at Bogotá on Nicaraguan intervention. A committee was set up to look into the matter; they reported that Nicaragua denied that troops had gone in (Somoza had informed us they had); Costa Rican delegate didn't want to say anything against Nicaragua and begged the issue, saying Nicaragua had always observed Costa Rican sovereignty and was doing so now as far as he knew. The Committee, of which we were a member, investigated but came up with the report that Costa Ricans had not brought the complaint and no facts could be proved. There was much difference of opinion among the Latin American countries over Nicaragua.

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The attitude has been to keep things quiet in Latin America and the problems have not been met.

There were indications that communists took part in the Costa Rican situation and had much to do with it; they were on both sides. They definitely came off the worse for their experience there. Mora and President Guardia's party were defeated; the leaders were exiled and are now in Mexico. Arevalo, present head of state in Guatemala, is apparently idealistic, impractical, and socialist, but definitely not communist. The committee of revolutionists per se is not communistic.

There was no evidence that the communists were affiliated with the revolution in Cuba.

This is a chronic situation, worse now than it has been for a long time, and definitely there is danger of war in this area. We can't step in and say to the governments concerned that we will make a real issue of it and take measures of force; this would definitely be an end of the good neighbor policy.

Whatever feeling there may be in Latin America to control the Caribbean situation, it is not nearly so strong as would be the opposition to our wielding the big stick and telling people where to get off. Such machinery as there is hasn't been used. Inter-American machinery is in the developing process. Our recourse is to use existing machinery and exert our leadership. If machinery doesn't work we are not in a position to protect our interests if we can't act unilaterally and others won't act multilaterally. Chances for international action are not favorable.

Venezuelans in this country violated American laws and were not prosecuted because of political reasons.

If multilateral approach doesn't work there are other things we must do. The machinery must be started.

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